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Article

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SITUATION OF ROMANIAN ROMA LIVING IN ENCAMPMENTS IN POLAND AND OPPORTUNI- TIES OF PARTICIPATION IN SPORTING ACTIVITIES THE CASE OF POZNAŃ

Abstract: The phenomenon of migration and the challenges in the new hosting country have been often analysed in relation to the newcomers arriving from states outside of the European Union. However, in Poland these are the citizens of the EU who face discrimination. At the same time, despite the principles of the EU programs concerning different spheres and operations of integrative and inclusive character aimed at foreign nationals, including sport initiatives, Roma have been systematically omitted and excluded since the 1990s. This situation caused this group to be deprived of the right to work, health care, welfare and adequate housing and education. Opportunities of participating in sporting activities are very limited. In Poland, only a few non-governmental organisations and anti-racist activist initiatives attempt to cooperate with the members of this community. The first part of the article contains a broad introduction to the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland which is necessary in the light of the lack of studies on this subject within Polish sociology, and allows the reader to grasp the wider context of the discussion on the issue of access to sporting activities. Then, drawing on the research and activist experience, the author describes local sport initiatives available to Roma children living in the Poznań encampment, with emphasis on informal initiatives.

Keywords: Romanian Roma, sport, children, encampments, inclusion policy, empowerment.

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Sport holds an important place in the lives of many EU citizens and plays a strong societal role with a powerful potential for social inclusion in and through sport, meaning that participation in sport or in physical activity in many different ways contributes to inclusion into society; whereby inclusion in sport involves a combination of 'sport for all', equal access to sport, equal opportunities in sport, and varied demand-oriented sporting opportunities and sport facilities, and whereby social inclusion through sport involves inclusive participation in society, community development and strengthened social cohesion.

Excerpt from the Official Journal of the European Union

Council conclusions of 18 November 2010 on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion 2010/C 326/04

Introduction: on participatory research and the situation of Roma in Poland

In order to show the complexity of the issues discussed in the article, the author shall start with a concise description of the situation of one of the poorest groups of foreign EU nationals in Poland - Roma of Romanian origin. Secondly, the article will describe small-scale sporting initiatives which due to their emancipatory character and principles are available to Romanian Roma children. Oftentimes, children who live in the encampments have never before used sport venues. In order to understand the reason behind such a state of affairs, the introduction will outline the social situation of Roma. The author puts a greater emphasis on the social context affecting the children's access to sporting initiatives, rather than on the initiatives themselves as sport is not the author's usual research area. The issue related to the sport activity of the poorest foreign nationals is a side-subject, hence the article will be of a descriptive character.

To conduct fieldwork in Roma encampments in Poland, without exoticisation, ethnisation, essentialisation and stereotypical interpretations resulting from the notion of a „nomadic” life style and particular cultural traits constantly ascribed to Roma, including the alleged reluctance towards sport activities, requires critical thinking. Researchers should remain aware of their social standing and use self-reflexivity to constantly redefine their consciousness in the context of their privileged position. Such a position is the result of a completely different life experience, social status, or – to use Bourdieu's term – a different habitus². Encampments serve the function of home, a collective shelter for the whole community. The hermetic nature of the encampments is to a large extent

² Pierre Bourdieu, directly connects the definition of habitus with the understanding of “field”. „The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively »regulated« and »regular”». (Bourdieu 1977:72)

the result of, and not a reason behind, the exclusion of Roma community. Over the course of the research conducted as a representative of a grass-root tenants' movement between 2012-2018, our group was asked on several occasions by journalists, reporters, photographers and artist to facilitate the realisation of their individual project at the encampment³. Growing number of people wished to conduct projects „**about**” Roma, and only few „**with**” Roma. A crucial mistake of majority of those involved was that they arrived at the encampment with certain preconceived notions or ideas which did not consider including Roma in activities and discussions. The differences in socio-economic situation between the researchers and the Roma impaired the latter ones' understanding of the research goal, while the results proved irrelevant and unhelpful in increasing their agentship. Usually, after a longer conversation, some of the people (those more aware of the implications of their actions) abandoned the projects. Researchers, such as Ian Hancock, expressed concern about a possibly biased and privileged approach of some social scientists. Hancock (2002), who is of Roma origin, is a scientist involved in *Romani Studies*, affiliated with the University of Austin. On multiple occasions during his conference lectures he criticised the common approach, stating that Roma are often not subjects in the research concerning them, but usually objects of the research (this thought was expressed for example during his „Romani Origins and Identity: New Directions” lecture, recording of which is available on the Internet).⁴

Drawing on the experiences of the research conducted in 2017 in Romania, the author of the article is led to believe that a similar problem occurred there. Pata Rat in Cluj-Napoca, as one of the oldest and largest Roma ghettos⁵ in Europe, attracts many photographers, NGO workers, journalists and social scientists. The Roma residents of the settlement emphasise the futility of the activities of the constant visitors, suggesting that they are being used⁶.

Due to the author's involvement in the local tenants' rights association which is the part of the self-organised movement⁷, this article focuses on the situation

³ The author carried out activist operations under the Tenants Association of the Wielkopolska Province (WSL). The fragment refers to experiences gained during the research, and to activist operations at the encampment located in Poznań, which is inhabited by over a hundred Roma of Romanian origin. Operations carried out by WSL are described on the following website: www.wsl-poznan.pl (accessed: 06.04.2018).

⁴ The complete presentation during the conference at the Upsala University in Sweden is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTsqiP196Uw> (accessed: 06.04.2018)

⁵ For the purposes of this work I use the words „ghetto” and „encampment” interchangeably. Both have a similar structure of closed agglomerations of people. The validity of using the word „ghetto” in reference to Roma encampments is discussed later in the chapter.

⁶ This conclusion is based on an extensive research and interviews conducted by the author at the location. The residents' observations and dissatisfaction with the visitors and researchers suggests that the Roma have often been subjected to exoticisation or used for the benefit of others – for example when lectures of the local university would send students to the settlement in order to practice participant observation, which some residents viewed as a objectifying.

⁷ The Tenants Association of the Wielkopolska Province (pol. WSL) has also co-organised the first educational-recreational initiatives for Romanian Roma children in Poznań, drawing on Paulo Freire's method of freedom education. In 2012, while commencing first activist operations, mainly related to interventions aimed at responding to Roma being denied access to healthcare, attacks on their homes, or abuse of power directed at this group, the Roma children themselves had in a way forced the emergence of grass-root education groups. They expressed the wish to participate in school classes and go outside the encampment. This is how a cooperation was brought to existence, involving cinema and theatre outings, and participation in different workshops. These experiences were significantly different to daily

of the Romanian Roma in Poznań. The association's relation with this community differs from a typical NGO's work process, as its members participate in the blockades against the evictions of Roma families, as well as organise night interventions following racist attacks on Roma homes⁸. It is important at this point to characterise the different groups of Roma referred to throughout the article. The article focuses mainly on the situation of Romanian Roma who live in encampments in Poland, which is the case with most Romanian Roma who migrate to Poland. This group can be defined as Roma people holding Romanian citizenship who migrated to Poland and settled in self-made encampments due to their socio-economic situation. It should be highlighted that their situation does not derive from a personal choice, neither is culturally-determined, but it is more a response to the years of systemic discrimination. In fact, in the 1990s, only 4-5% of Romanian Roma led a nomadic lifestyle (Braham 1993). Majority of Roma who have been migrating to Poland since the 1990s, oftentimes come from the poorest families from the villages surrounding Sibiu, Medias, Fagaras and Brasov⁹. Romanian Roma living in Poland claim that their situation, even though dire, is still better than in Romania. It is essential not to view Roma as a homogeneous group. Polish Roma have a completely different legal status. The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages from the 6th of January 2005 defines an ethnic and national minority as a group of citizens of Poland whose presence in Poland can be traced at least a hundred years back. As citizens (Roma from ethno-linguistic groups: Bergitka, Polish Roma, Kałderasze, Lowarzy, Chałdarytka, Sasytka, Sinti, Wurdonara) they have access to healthcare, education, job market and other services. In reality, however, they still face many obstacles due to discrimination. Romanian Roma do not have strong ties and relations with Roma who hold Polish citizenship.

life at the encampment. However, the most important activities of the tenants' movement have a non-commercial and socio-political character. Their aim is not the development of an organisational structure (NGO) but the support of self-organisation and strengthening the situation of Roma. At the same time, the organisation does not have a full-time job structure. Diverse forms of operations and the 'action' cooperation with academics, lawyers, activists or artists aims at shaping social consciousness as well as political pressure directed at changes in migration policy for poor EU migrants (not only Roma).

⁸ The interventions are described on the website of The Tenants Association of the Wielkopolska Province. Events from April 2018, at the moment of completing work on the chapter, were also described in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper (Lehman 2017).

⁹ This information was collected during the author's research work and is still constantly enriched through an ongoing work process on the PhD thesis. Some of the research materials consist of interviews conducted with the first people who worked with Romanian Roma in the 1990s, as well as of copies of passports made by these first support groups.

Research methodology

Information collected in this work results from fieldwork, observations and interviews conducted in the period of 2012-2018 in Poland and Romania. The research process, data collection, and observation can be divided into three stages. The first one, which started in 2012, was related to getting in contact with the community of Roma immigrants in Poznań. Then a country-wide fieldwork took place (from 2015 to 2016) and study trips to Romania (2015, 2017 and 2018). The decision on the necessity of taking up research concerning the diagnosis of the Romanian Roma's situation in Poland resulted directly from practical operations carried out by the WSL (The Tenants' Association for the Wielkopolska Province) and from the fact that the international literature does not discuss Poland as a destination of Romanian Roma migration (due to the lack of studies, statistical data, etc.).

The research on the Roma community, coordinated by the author and realised by the Western Centre for Social and Economic Research ("Własnym głosem..." 2015), constituted the first sociological research in Poland which was an attempt to analyse the situation of Romanian Roma on a country-wide scale. During the field study, research group conducted (or co-conducted) 62 questionnaire interviews within six Polish encampments, 18 in-depth interviews in 2015 in Poland, 6 in-depth interviews with activists acting for the benefit of Roma rights in Romania, 7 interviews with Roma living in Romania (Pata Rat and the Sibiu region)¹⁰, 6 in-depth interviews with the representatives of the city of Wrocław and NGOs, and, finally, 2 interviews with the actors of the Ósmego Dnia Theatre in Poznań who in the 1990s helped the first groups of Romanian Roma. The author conducted an interview with the ethnologist Paweł Lechowski, who helped the first groups of Romanian Roma who at the beginning of the 1990s reached the country and settled near Cracow. This way, the research group obtained information on the legal status of 226 people, including 122 children.

The data collected during the interviews was partially subjected to quantitative analysis, whereas the in-depth interviews to a qualitative one. Additionally, conclusions were also a result of discussion with the Roma, and activist supporters from the encampments located in Poland (Gdańsk, Kraków, Słomniki, Wrocław, Poznań), and Romania (Cluj Napoka, Sibiu). A total number of around 500 people lived on Polish encampments at the time. However, Roma residing in encampments represent a wider group of immigrants whose size the researchers did not manage to determine.

The data was collected on the basis of the snowball method¹¹ – residents of subsequent settlements informed the researchers of spaces inhabited by larger

¹⁰ Sibiu – city located in Transylvania, is also the capital of the administrative region of the same name. A large number of people living in the countryside and smaller towns located in this region, for years have been migrating to Poland. This subject will be developed further in the following sections.

¹¹ Snowball sampling – a method of non-arbitrary selection of sample based on recruiting participants of study through other participants.

groups of immigrants in Poland. In Romania, the research group received support of members of Roma families which live in Poland. Some Roma informed their family members in advance of the group's arrival, asking, at the same time, for the permission to give interviews or tell their stories. In Romania the research group could visit the places where the Roma living in Poland come from. Of course, it can be debated whether the study is representative. The researchers reached only the most populous encampments in Poland, a few families and a small number of Roma activist and Roma supporters in Romania. Interviews were conducted in Polish, Romanian, and English. Not everyone wanted to participate in the study. Reasons for the refusal of participation declared by Roma living in the encampments in Poland were concerns regarding potential further use of the results by third parties, forwarding personally identifiable information to border authorities, and fear of deportation or incurring potential consequences related to the illegal construction of settlements, etc. The research group visited each of the encampments in Poland several times (most frequently the one in Poznań). The main reason for refusing to participate in the research in Romania was a significant lack of trust and resentment for the use of community by researchers, photographers and artists (especially in Cluj Napoca). Research process was easier in Poland due to the fact that researchers were members of an activist group which politically identifies with Roma, and at the same time acts for the benefit of the most disadvantaged social groups – including Roma, which earned trust of the community¹². Attempted arson, throwing stones or Molotov cocktails, threats, creating sanitary cordons around encampments and forced relocations executed by the police in early morning hours, turned out to be the experience of Roma not only in Poland but also in France and Romania among other places.

Research works in Romania were conducted three times: the first time author interviewed activists of a local tenants' movement in Bucharest in 2015; then, in 2017, in order to realise the next stage of the research the author went to the largest encampment inhabited by Roma in Romania - Pata Rat ¹³. In February 2018, the author travelled to cities where the families living in Poland came from, in order to understand why the Roma claim to be in a better situation at the Polish encampments, without electricity and water, than at their previous abodes in Romania which seem to have better sanitary conditions.

Drawing on the methodology of critical sociology¹⁴ and *action research*¹⁵ in

¹² The Tenants Association of the Wielkopolska Province and the international coalition of activists and researchers: European action coalition for the right to housing and to the city.

¹³ It is an encampment inhabited by approximately 1500 people. It is located on the outskirts of the largest university hub in Romania, the city of Cluj Napoca.

¹⁴ The theoretical inspiration for this works comes from critical orientation and radical sociology. According to the principles and, to some extent, methodological advice of C.W. Mills, the author rejects the positivist belief in the possibility of objective study of social reality. At the same time, the social conflict mode is assumed here. The greatest methodological-cognitive value of the radical and critical perspective in sociology, lies in the research process which combines three essential aspects: theory, empiricism and politics. Janusz Mucha's „Sociology as social criticism” is a comprehensive compendium on this sociological perspective (Mucha 1986).

¹⁵ The author has elaborated on advantages of *action research* together with Joanna Kostka, PhD., in the article entitled: „Models of knowledge production in the study of radical urban movements”, published in a peer-reviewed journal *In-*

the conducted research, operations, and observations, and later on in the resultant discussions with the Roma community, the author attempted to create pathways enabling inclusion of Roma in the research work. It could be said, in line with Russel and Duncan, that taking practical actions aimed at the improvement of the situation of a certain community is the key element of research of a participatory character.

The results from the research process were on multiple occasions used by activists in Poland during meetings of NGOs, expert groups, meetings with government representatives (ombudsman, national minorities officials, etc.), and in local governments' meetings. The aim of these meetings was to facilitate a debate on how to develop a local and Poland-wide policy concerning this group of poor foreign nationals. One of the subjects discussed, was children's access to education including sporting activities. The research allowed to describe the socio-economic situation of Roma and launch discussions and operations aimed at facilitating the access to education and sporting activities of children living at the encampment. Viewed from this perspective, the research could prove helpful not only to academics but also to practitioners – trainers working with poor foreign children and for Romanian Roma. Constructing knowledge usable only in the debates of a rather hermetic academic circle is not the priority. Similarly to Russel (2015) or Juris (2007), the author treats sociological research in this case as an emancipation tool, at the same time questioning the paramount role of university as, in some cases, limited by hierarchic structure and thus limited in terms of possibilities of using research results in social practice (Czarnota 2018). In order to facilitate such possibilities, some of the reports are available to public and their form is non-academic because most of the time communities do not have access to research results and cannot use them in practice. In the study, the method of militant research is used as one of the forms of participatory research approach. At the same time, by using the term of militant research, the author wishes to put strong emphasis on the goal of the research and application of its results. Thus the experience is referred to that of activists and academics coalitions including *Collectivo Situaciones* (2003), or the *Madrid Observatoria Metropolitana* which describe themselves as “militant research group that utilizes investigations and counter-mapping to look into the metropolitan processes of precarious workers, migrants, and militants taking place in Madrid, brought on by crisis, gentrification, speculation and displacement.”

terface: a journal for and about social movement. available for open access at <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Interface-9-1-Kostka-and-Czarnota.pdf> (accessed: 16.05.2018). The methodological approach characteristic for *Action* and *activist research* presupposes the implementation and utilisation of research results in effecting a social change.

The context of the social situation of Roma immigrants in Poland – encampments as living spaces

The encampments of Roma immigrants of Romanian origin in Poland have never before been a subject of a wider academic research. There were no analyses or wider scientific debates devoted to the migration policy concerning the most disadvantaged migrants - and Roma constitute the most notable example thereof. Only in press, have materials related to deportations or relocations in the 1990s been published (archived mainly by „Gazeta Wyborcza”). In recent years, Polish activists affiliated with universities in Gdańsk and Wrocław have started to introduce the subject of Romanian Roma to academic debate. While collecting data on the socio-economic status of Romanian Roma in Europe in Romania since the 1990s, the author has mainly found English-language studies, which generally omit the case of Poland. The exception is the digitalised report constituting the official UNHCR report from 1993 entitled: *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The Untouchables: A survey of the Roma People of Central and Eastern Europe, March 1993*, authored by Mark Braham. The report includes a chapter on Romanian Roma in Poland and a mention of the fact that the first groups started to come to Cracow in 1991. According to this study, Roma treated migrations to Poland „only as to a transit country.” (Braham 1993:90) This presumption, as it turned out, had no reflection in reality. At least some of the Roma tried to settle in Poland permanently.

When we think about where Roma live and what they do, the stereotypical viewpoint often leads us to presumptions such as „dangerous slums” or „picturesque gypsy wagons”. In reality, the encampment spaces in Poland usually consist of self-made barracks which one can treat as a collective response to the many years of housing exclusion, uncertainty in regards to a future place of residence, and a systemic segregation, deportations and relocations experienced by Romanian Roma in Poland. Constructional structure of the encampments in Poland have not changed much since the 1990s. They do not only consist of barracks built of wood and found doors or planks, but some families often live in tents, while others occupy desolate buildings. Due to a constantly presumed temporariness of the housing situation, there is not much work invested in the construction of encampments and hence living conditions do not improve. However, the situation is often not temporary. This is why, some activists cooperating with Roma postulate for the shift from using the term „encampment” towards „settlements” or „Roma estates”, arguing that for most Roma, the encampments, contrary to what the name may suggest, are not temporary homes but permanent places of residence where subsequent generations are raised. In the approach proposed in this article, the housing conditions of Roma are the consequence of a low socio-economic status of this group, which requires a rapid change. Moreover, Roma children need appropriate educational programmes including sporting activities which would be available to this community. In order to outline a wider, European context, conclusion of this

part of the chapter draws on the work of Giovanni Picker of the Social Policy, Sociology and Criminal Science Department at the University of Birmingham. The author of *Racial Cities. Governance and the Segregation of Romani People In Urban Europe* (2017), the first publication entirely devoted to the segregation of Romanian Roma in European cities, compared the media representation of this social group with the discourse of eugenics showing how social acceptance of relocations and social exclusion of Roma is constructed under then headings of „cleansing the cities” in the name of maintaining order and social peace¹⁶. Picker also introduced a new term into the literature of the studies concerned with the Romanian Roma encampments (which even in the international context is rather sparse) – *Gypsy Urban Areas* (GUA)¹⁷. In his work, the scholar describes diverse mechanisms of social segregation aimed at this community. Limited access to sporting activities is just one of those.

Similarly to the case of Roma encampments in Poland, most media and politicians around Europe subscribe to a view equating these type of districts with danger, urban crisis, anti-social behaviour, and, unchangingly and predominantly, with „Gypsies”. GUA, regardless of the form they take (encampments, estates, barracks), are spaces inhabited solely by Roma. These communities are characterised by a high level of unemployment in comparison to the residents of other urban areas. *Gypsy Urban Areas* typically have a minimal or no access to services (e.g. waste disposal, running water), no access to school or clinics, abound with desolate buildings and substandard housing conditions, and are marked by high social stigmatisation. The encampments of Romanian Roma in Poland, due to the characteristics listed by the researcher, appear to constitute a type of a GUA. Potential differences derive only from the local economic, historical, political or urban planning context. Children from the encampments who wish to take up sporting activities ‚outside’, are strongly stigmatised due to their poverty and origin. When it comes to this group, disclosing the information on the place of residence often comes with additional stigma and ascribing them with negative traits.

In Poland, Romanian Roma have been equated with „illegal immigrants” ever since the 1990s. Such an approach has largely remained unchanged even despite the accession of Poland and Romania to the European Union (Poland’s in 2004, Romania’s in 2007). It is still thought that they break the Polish law by settling in the encampments. This way of interpreting their immigration (even though Romanian Roma, as the EU citizens, have the right to stay on the territory of Poland) impairs the possibility of integration. Moreover, they are still viewed by the public as a group of nomads who appeared in Poland relatively recently. The lack of equal rights in the access to citizenship and the rights which come with it, is conditioned by many factors including class and ethnic mark-

¹⁶ A very similar mechanism can be seen on the example of a famous „Jews-lice” poster published by the propaganda office of the Third Reich.

¹⁷ The originator of the GUA term subjects the following areas to his analysis: Fakulteta in Sofia, Caneda Real and Galilero in Madrit, Lunik IX in Koszyce, La Barbuta and Casilino 900 in Rome, Jozsefvaros in Budapest, Saint-Jacques in Perpignan in the Ferentari district of Budapest. Picker describes all of the above mentioned locations as the most prominent examples of the social segregation of urban spaces in the 21st century Europe (Picker 2017: 3).

ers. It is noteworthy that in Poland, a country which has been very ethnically and culturally homogeneous since the second World War, sociology has rarely alluded to the Chicago school which analyses the relation between race, racism and socio-spatial segregation. Nevertheless, in the light of the discussion around the issue of relocating the refugees from the Middle East to Poland, as well as in the light of the increasing number of foreign workers arriving from beyond the Eastern border (mainly from Ukraine), the issue of segregation gains additional significance in the context of what Monika Bobako, PhD. (drawing mainly on Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein) terms the racialisation of poverty and class distinctions. The aim of this process is the discursive legitimization of social inequalities and often of exploitation. In Poland, a significant increase of racist attacks noted by the police can serve as a certain type of a marker of such a development.¹⁸ Dr Giovanni Picker approaches the segregation of Roma as a dynamic process characterised by the concentration and separation of homogeneous groups which are categorised in the public consciousness as „other” from the majority and hence defined as such (Picker 2017). These differences can also have a socio-economic background.

Access of Roma children of Romanian origin to sport initiatives – the case of Poznań

Roma children living at encampments in Poznań have a very limited access to sport initiatives (both those offered as part of formal education as well as commercial ones). The reason behind this state of affairs is not only poverty and the resultant need to devote time to working alongside parents (also begging), but also the situation of this group described in the preceding subsections of the text. Integration of foreign nationals (thorough sport or other initiatives) has never been a priority of neither local nor national government. The situation of Roma immigrants of Romanian origin in Poland illustrates the lack of migration policy which would facilitate integration or inclusion of this group. The approach of the current government to the migration issue is most aptly reflected in the Polish government's response to the so-called “migration crisis” – Poland did not accept any number of refugees, nor did it implement any aid measures. Popular sport initiatives aimed at increasing independence and strengthening migrant communities, unlike in other EU countries such as Germany, France, Greece, Spain or Italy, constitute projects realised on a far smaller scale – by a few NGOs or entirely on a grass-roots level. In order to understand how important it is for children to participate in these activities, one must be aware that the everyday reality of the youngest inhabitants of encampments is related to functioning

¹⁸ This concerns a number of incidents when a group of people, or a single individual, was publicly insulted on the grounds of their national, ethnic, racial, or denominational origin, or when for the same reasons a harm was done to the physical integrity of a person. In the year of 2000, there were 25 such cases, in 2005 – also 25; in 2010 – 43, and since then the number has begun to grow up to 768 incidents in 2015 and 765 in 2016. Roma very often fall victims to such attacks. For example, the Wirtualna Polska website reported that the data presented by the police shows that in 2015 the most frequent victims were Jews, Muslims and Roma (Górzyński 2017), (Fajfer 2017).

within the encampment or the experience of begging (and being humiliated by other people) on the streets of Poznań. Sport initiatives and competitions allow children to experience the world from a different perspective – trips to cultural institutions or sports venues organised by activists are often the first such experiences in their lives. Especially these sport initiatives where children interact with other participants on equal terms (and are not treated on the basis of their place of origin or residence) have a particular strengthening and developing significance. Research, the methodology of which is described above, did not concern sport. Nevertheless, the access to cultural and sporting initiatives as a part of a wider access to services and education was one of the subjects of the in-depth interviews. Drawing on the acquired activist and research experience, this part will describe sport initiative which can be used by Roma children living in encampments. The article presents the case of Poznań and the city's encampment inhabited by around 100 people, including 30 children. In describing the positive impact of participation in sporting initiatives for children the notion of empowerment will be used, understood as strengthening the agency of the marginalised group. This notion is defined in relation to Bourdieu's theory of the forms of capital, as: the possibility of expanding social and cultural capital of Roma children through strengthening self-confidence and self-esteem through the possibility to discover new spaces (sport venues, training facilities), gaining experiences of interacting on equal terms with other participants in a given situation and space (trainings, classes), learning, at the same time, the significance of the principles of cooperation and mutual respect (and not only competition). Mutual respect and the atmosphere of openness between children during trainings translates to a significant work on emotions. It especially helps to process negative emotions related to frustration and the necessity to compete for resources. Honorata Jakubowska used the notion of „sport as an emotional enclave” pointing to the role of sporting activities in managing both positive (pleasant) and negative (related to aggression) emotions. Highlighting, at the same time, that: „the term of work on emotions is used by Loïc Wacquant in his book *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. The author draws our attention to the fact that what matters in the boxing ring is not only physical fitness but also the appropriate management of emotions depending on circumstances, the ability of containing them, or manifesting them in a controlled way when necessary (Wacquant 2004: 91–92).” (Jakubowska 2017: 28)

Firstly, the subject of school activity will be looked at, which is discussed here as one of the possibilities of participating in social life.

Despite the official obligation of compulsory education concerning all children, which is written into the Polish law, not all schools are appropriately prepared for the presence of foreigner nationals. There is a lack of sufficient teacher trainings, as well as integration programs. Multi-cultural assistants, or Roma assistants, in Polish schools are a rarity. According to the available data obtained from the Department of Analyses and Prognoses of the Ministry of National Education in the period from March 2014 to March 2015, there were only 2

people employed as assistants in the whole Wielkopolska Province. Another problem lies in the abuse of power by the directors of national education facilities, which impairs taking up the education and attending classes with Polish pupils. A negative decision is most often backed by the child's lack of documentation concerning previous education (which is not in line with the Polish legal regulations), or the lack of appropriate staff – i.e. the assistants. In 2018, only 7 out of 30 children living at the encampment in Poznań have been attending one of Poznań's schools. It has to be emphasised that these children entered the education system thanks to activist operations and the openness of one of the primary schools in Poznań. Other children, despite their willingness, cannot start education. It is related mostly to the fact that the primary school which was the first in Poznań to admit Roma children in 2014 now struggles with overcrowded classrooms. Another reason is the lack of initiative or willingness of local governments to take up an intervention which would result in respecting the right to education of the children of disadvantaged migrants from other EU countries. Those children from Roma encampments who already attend school, sometimes do not want to attend some physical education activities together with their peers. Bad housing conditions and poverty (no access to running water, electricity, washing machine and sanitary facilities) result in children lacking clean clothes or an extra pair of shoes, unlike other classmates. Some face additional problems when it comes to the necessity of changing in the presence of other children in common changing rooms – boys from more traditional families are not used to exposing their legs, and even wearing knee-long sport shorts can be problematic. Nevertheless, children, fearing a negative judgement or being ashamed, sometimes do not inform instructors of the reason behind their reluctance to participate. The experience of one of the people co-organising the games and play workshop, illustrates the problem in relation to a specific example:

I remember how at one point during the workshops one of the boys refused to participate in the next part of the activity. He stood in the corner of the room and said that he got bored. I found it strange because he actively participated in the previous stages of the same workshops and I got an impression that he was enjoying himself. Children were to take off their shoes and sit down on the mat. (...) Only after a while I realised that the problem was that he had two unmatching dirty socks. (...) Until the end of the workshop, the child observed from a distance how the rest participated. He was afraid of being mocked, and the instructors could not help him because no one had spare clothes he could change into... [B1].

This situation occurred during informal workshops, particularly focused on generating a friendly atmosphere. The children, therefore, were not punished (e.g. with negative marks) or forced to participate. It could be presumed that a similar behaviour during school classes would result in punishing the child for „bad behaviour”, and his behaviour would be described as showing unwillingness to cooperate with other members of the group. A significant role in identifying the actual cause of refusal to participate is played by the teacher's knowledge and experience of Romanian Roma's situation in Poland. Some of the respondents worked with Roma children both as part of an informal education, as well as within the school education (as assistants).

When it comes to the subject of possibilities related to taking up sport activities outside formal education, it seems obvious to state that some sport disciplines can be categorised as elitist and difficult to access for poor children, for example horse riding, sailing, diving, extreme sports, or skiing. Participation in such sports requires both economic capital, as well as the knowledge of specific cultural codes, which were described by Bourdieu in his work „Distinction”. In his analysis of social reality, Bourdieu uses the concept of field and habitus. Bourdieu treats sport as a separate field, where cultural capital can be subject to change. According to his notions, a constant social rivalry for different forms of cultural capital takes place within specific fields. Skills and knowledge, sport equipment owned, preferred dress code, body posture and its physique, constitute in this approach a social distinction, meaning a differentiation and divisions which were widely described in his main work of *Distinction* (2005). In some societies, even caring about appearance and body becomes a distinctive marker of belonging to an upper class.¹⁹

It sometimes happens that children coming from poorer families do have access to specific ‚elitist’ sporting activities, however, it usually comes with a different set of rules for their participation, e.g. working in lieu of horse riding lessons by cleaning the stables, or performing other type of unpaid work for the owner of a specific sports club (cleaning, guarding the property, etc.).

The critical analysis of sport in relation to capitalist economy and mass culture which presents sport as a component of the culture industry, was taken up

¹⁹ Michał Lenartowicz, in the text entitled „Class conditionings of sport from the theoretical perspective of Pierre Bourdieu” (2012), offers a clear summary of the characteristic features of sport practices and sport preferences of upper classes described by Bourdieu: “Summing up the characteristic sport practices and sport preferences of upper classes described by Bourdieu (2005:260–277), particular attention must be given to:

¹⁾ upper classes’ avoidance of team sports, due to their common popularity, having to be subjected to a group discipline and valuing such virtues as a physical strength, resistance to pain, brutality and apotheosis of physical violence and physical contact;

²⁾ wanting to practice the sport in places which are guarded and not accessible to everyone (private clubs), even when „there’s a possibility to cheaply engage in the same type of activity together with others (open facilities and free services)” (which is one of the reasons the upper class club members are accused of snobbery);

³⁾ wanting to independently decide on the time of sport activities (which is not in line with the stable and regular character of training in team sports and in competitive sports in general);

⁴⁾ the need to have the right to choose a partner for sporting activities (and not accepting the team composition determined by a coach)

⁵⁾ the need for a less intense and independently determined physical effort;

⁶⁾ high investment of time and effort in a specific technical training which „autonomises [...] from changes in body capital and its shrinkage with age.”

in a broader context by the representatives of the Frankfurt School. The stance of the school was that popular cultural products in film, music and sport lack critical and transcendent qualities of high culture, such as canonical literature and music. The researchers' approach sport critically as "instrumentally standardised and packed commodities with a 'pseudo individualization' that distracts the masses from a state of 'unfreedom'" (Giulianotti 2015: 31). The book *Sport: A Critical Sociology* recalls words of Marcus (1964) in the following way: "Marcus argued that advanced industrialism creates a one-dimensional humanity of 'false needs' (similar to consumer culture) generating 'euphoria in unhappiness'". In the capitalist system, there is a need for types of entertainment which channel dissatisfaction and at the same time serve the function of a valve which enables the release of emotions (Elias and Dunning 1986), and null the need for critical thinking or engaging in operations empowering marginalised communities. The issue of sport and marginalisation in relation to ethnic diversity was taken up by the sociologist William Julius Wilson (1978, 2008). Wilson argued that it is not 'race' but class which has a potentially greater impact on life circumstances of African Americans, especially those living in extreme poverty. He claimed that in sport, the scale of exclusion due to class origin or 'race' is illustrated through the social composition of the players of elitist sports, such as sailing. The researcher also discussed how American involvement in baseball has declined, partly through the sport's move from free-to-air to subscription television, and due to the restricted spaces in poor neighbourhoods for playing and practising (Giulianotti 2015). An alternative for commercialised sporting activities is exemplified in initiatives referencing historical sport traditions of anti-racist and antifascist workers' clubs which in Poland originated before 1939 (Blerski 2013). In Poznan, an example of such initiative can be a gym operating within the Rozbrat Squat²⁰ established in 2012 under the name of Freedom Fighters. Currently, it is the only place in Poznan where also Roma children from encampments can regularly attend trainings as fully-fledged participants. The sport facility and the gym operate on the principles of openness, on the basis of the assumption that sporting activity should serve a strengthening function and inclusively engage all participants regardless of their gender, ethnic origin or economic status²¹. Children from the encampment can take advantage of the opportunity to attend trainings three times a week, during which they are treated as any other participants. The offer includes Muay Thai, Kettlebell, Yoga and Cross Fit trainings. Participants can also use the infrastructure - showers,

²⁰ Rozbrat is the oldest squat in Poland, established in 1994 in Poznan on Kazimierza Pułaskiego street. The name of the squat, Rozbrat, means disagreement or the lack of permission, and refers to the lack of agreement for power, centralisation and hierarchy. Rozbrat's activity is based on self-governance and grass-root organisation. This place serves as a back office for workers' movement (the Workers Initiative - an Anarcho-syndicalist Workers' Union), tenants' movement (Tenants Association of the Wielkopolska Province), and many other initiatives of a political and cultural character. Website: www.rozbrat.org

²¹ Other examples of such type of grass-roots initiative can be: Poznań: 'Skucha - Kłirowy Klub Sportowy' [Skucha - The Queer Sports Club], Warsaw: Ruchomy Klub Sportowy Gwiazda [Gwiazda the Mobile Sports Club], Alternatywny Klub Sportowy Zły [the Zły Alternative Sports Club]; Wrocław - Turniej Sztuk Walki Bez Przegranych [The No Losers Martial Arts Tournament]; Toruń: Turniej antyfaszystowski, 'Trenujemy nawet w deszcz' [The 'We train even when it's raining' Anti-fascists Tournament].

changing rooms and the equipment. In our conversations, the children stressed that the trainings increase their self-confidence. Their empowering function is also related to the opportunity to compete with Polish children and adults. Children who in their daily life view the world from the perspective of people begging in the streets, often insulted and yelled at, rarely have an opportunity to showcase their skills. At the same time, Freedom Fighters is a club which teaches sport rivalry while introducing the need to obey specific rules - cooperation, mutual respect, equal treatment, and anti-racism. Acting on a non-commercial basis, coaches perform their work pro-bono. At the same time, this grass-roots sporting initiative has professional equipment purchased mainly with solidarity contributions. In his critical analysis of sport, Adorno addressed its commercialisation in the context of the capitalist system. The critic analysed modern sport as being a field of both alienating work and ideological containment. Adorno argued that sports may seek to “restore the body to some of the functions of which the machine has deprived it”. He explained that “they do so only in order to train men all the more inexorably to serve the machine. The physical exertion of manual labour is replicated in sport, which its alienated practitioners must ‘learn to enjoy’. Sport is a pseudo-praxis, within rules that resemble the brutal competitiveness of the capitalist market” (Adorno 2001: 194-5). Adorno, just like many other critics studying the field of sport in relation to capitalist system, pointed out that commercialised sport does not serve an emancipatory and empowering function for the ‘powerless’.

Another initiative which uses sport as one of the tools in its work with the excluded, is a local-reach association established in 2008 in Poznań called the Rezerwat Group for Social Animation. In 2007, its creators organised an informal group described as the group of ‘street educators’ and decided to operate within the system of small grants. Events for children organised by them include regular, monthly trips to a swimming pool, bouldering, or the annual football tournament. It is important to highlight that for many children from the encampment, these outings constitute the first opportunity to use the infrastructure of sport facilities - during a trip to a swimming pool, or when using a climbing wall or playing paint-ball. All of these activities were related to the possibility of using the space which due to its commercial character and the socio-economic situation of Roma are usually completely inaccessible. For children from the encampment, the possibility to participate in sport activities within the commercial venues is also one of the few situations when they use the space on ‘equal terms’ together with other children. These experiences, are related to the opportunity of getting to know reality from a different perspective - Roma children begged on the streets together with their parents, being judged or humiliated during their work.

The financing system of grant applications used by the Rezerwat Social Animation Group makes the scope of their operations subject to opportunities related to external funding, contrary to operations organised under formal education. Nevertheless, the first group of Roma immigrants of Romanian origin has

begun education only in the recent years. So far, the Roma residing in Poznań since the 1990s have had no access to state education. The lack of Roma children in schools was often explained in public opinion by the stereotypical view of this group - attributing them with specific socio-cultural traits which Etienne Balibar, among others, identified with neo-racism (Balibar, et al. 1991). These features include „innate disdain” or „the culture of no education”. The representatives of the Wielkopolska Province Governor’s Office were among those who in their comments suggested that Roma do not want to learn.

Already a year ago, on the occasion of the situation on the Krauthofer street, I explained that these people have to first and foremost ask for help, submit documents serving as proofs of identity and nationality and a bank account balance, which would allow us to determine that they will not be using welfare benefits - explains Małgorzata Skrzypczak, the assistant director of the Civic and Foreign Affairs Department at the Wielkopolska Province Governor’s Office in a conversation with the Wirtualna Polska website. – Children of such people would also be obliged to take up compulsory education, which seems to have scared them away because up until now, a year has passed, not a single family has contacted us” – she adds. (Kubiak 2015)

Statements of the officials do not only stigmatise Roma but also build social acceptance for the directors of Poznań’s schools breach of the law on the compulsory public education. The experience of the activists of the Tenants Association for the Wielkopolska Province shows that between 2013-2018 in Poznań there were four cases when schools refused to enrol a child. Two other schools expressed willingness but declared that they are not prepared for Roma pupils.

The above section focuses on the informal grass-root initiatives such as the already mentioned Freedom Fighters and the Rezerwat Association for Social Animation as these are the only two sporting initiatives in Poznań which promote inclusive and anti-discriminatory approach to physical education for Romanian Roma children. Due to the open-access and anti-racist character of these organisations, children participating in the activities organised by these groups are not discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic origin or socio-economic status. Even though the disadvantaged children can also participate in sport activities at commercial sport clubs, it is often in return for unpaid labour, and is thus burdened with social stigma. Hence, more emphasis should be put on developing and supporting non-commercial or self-organised initiatives in order to avoid further commercialisation of sport and promote instead civic initiatives and greater integration of society through sport. Sporting initiatives can be a platform for exchange of values related to equality and anti-racism.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of migration and the challenges in the new hosting country have been often analysed in relation to newcomers arriving from states outside of the European Union. Romanian Roma economic immigrants living in Poland since the 1990s have been deprived of the right to work, health care, welfare and adequate housing. In Poland, only few non-governmental organisations and private individuals try to cooperate with members of this community. Roma encampments are located in hidden and inaccessible areas (e.g. deserted allotments, wasteland on the outskirts of urban settlements, etc.), out of the fear of aggression attacks. Despite numerous programs related to integration of foreign nationals through sport available in other EU countries, Romanian Roma have no possibility to participate in similar programs in Poland. As an unacknowledged “minority”, Romanian Roma officially do not constitute a part of the local community. Tradition of integration programs or initiatives aimed for foreign nationals in Poland, has never been particularly popular. Especially since the Second World War, the country has been rather culturally and ethnically homogeneous. They are a particular group due to the systemic exclusion which has been in place for many decades. To conclude, it is worth mentioning Aidan McGarry’s most recent book *Romaphobia*. The last acceptable form of racism” constitutes the most contemporary summary of how the lack of activity and presence of Roma in different spheres of social life is explained by racist and romaphobic prejudices, ascribing this community with “disdain” and specific negative character and culture traits as the reasons behind their absence and social “invisibility” (McGarry 2017). In the light of these conditions, creating opportunities for participation in sport activities for this most disadvantaged and discriminated migrants gains particular significance – it is often one of the first experiences related to joint participation and different treatment of Roma children. Access to sporting initiatives for Roma children living at the Poznań’s encampment is possible locally only as a part of the grass-roots sporting initiatives, such as Freedom Fighters and the Rezerwat Association for Social Animation. The role of this type of initiatives strengthens self-esteem and self-confidence of Roma children, enriching their experience. So far, international arena has seen many programs and studies concerned with the role of sport in integration and inclusion processes of Roma (e.g. *Development strategy of Roma sports as a tool of sport integration, Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma* (2015); *A Study of National Policies in Slovenia* (2011); *Round table: Roma inclusion and the role of sport* 2018), however, in the subject discussed here – the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland - the project described above constitutes the first study of such type. Sporting activity can serve a positive role, however, misunderstanding the complexity of the specific socio-economic situation of Roma children can lead to an excessive disciplining of this group and deepening the stereotypes which may solidify their low position in the social hierarchy. This is why it is important for this issue to become a subject of debates and activist-academic research.

‘Democratisation’ of sport has always caused members of the lower strata of society and diverse ethnic groups to have a noticeably increased access to sport disciplines. It is related to the decline of a strictly elitist status of sports associated with the lifestyle of the dominant classes. To policy of equal access to sport for foreign nationals, migrants and refugees on the example of Poland, shows that the principles of such policy are visible mainly (and sometimes only) on the pages of yet another declarations and EU programs (similar to the one cited at the beginning of the article). In practice, many groups including Romanian Roma are significantly deprived of the possibility to use sporting initiatives. Drawing on Bourdieu’s categories, the experience of Roma children from the Poznań encampment related to participation in sporting initiatives have contributed to the increase of their cultural capital and empowerment through building their self-esteem, acquisition of new skills and interpersonal abilities in contacts with other children. Viewed from this perspective, sport serves the function of inclusion and integration. We can conclude that the formal and commercial sport initiatives in Poland are far from being inclusive and anti-racist. This constitutes a major obstacle in multi-dimensional programs supporting social integration, since sport can serve a significant supporting and inclusive role as the element of a wider and thought-out migration policy. In case of Romanian Roma from the Poznań’s encampment, we cannot speak about a realistic inclusion through sport. Sporting activity of the children from the encampment currently serves a different role - as one of the few opportunities to spend time with other children or to be outside the encampments. When it comes to the participation of Romanian Roma and other disadvantaged children in sporting activities, it is essential to bear in mind their poverty, lack of citizenship, and social stereotypes. Despite numerous publications and official documents on the integration of different social groups through sport, the implementation of such solutions is not a priority of the authorities. It is only one of the results of the current policy which strengthens social inequality instead of integrating the groups which have for years suffered systemic and social discrimination. It could be said that formally Romanian Roma children living in Polish encampments are generally excluded from the opportunity to use formal and commercial sporting initiatives. The only available alternative are the grass-root, anti-racist initiatives which operated on a far smaller scale.

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